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# Oyotunji: The Yoruba Community in the United States

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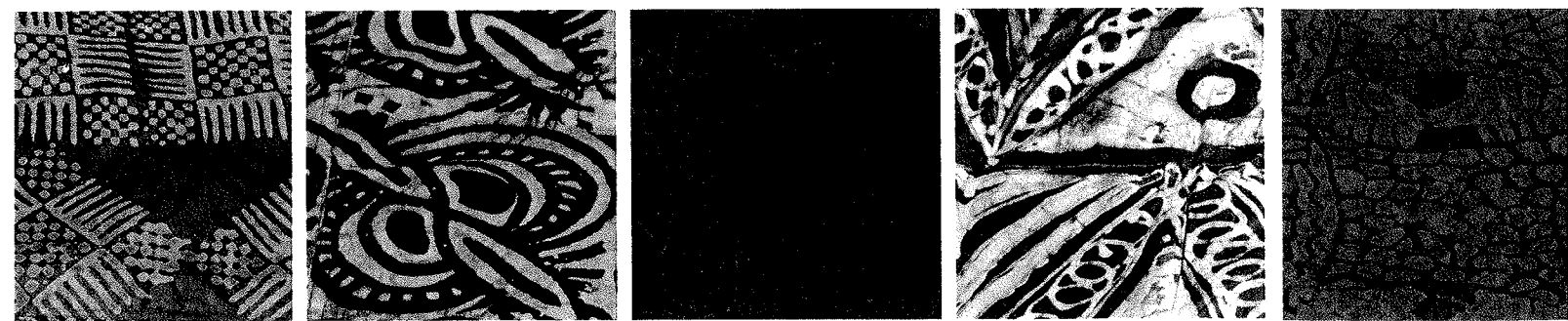
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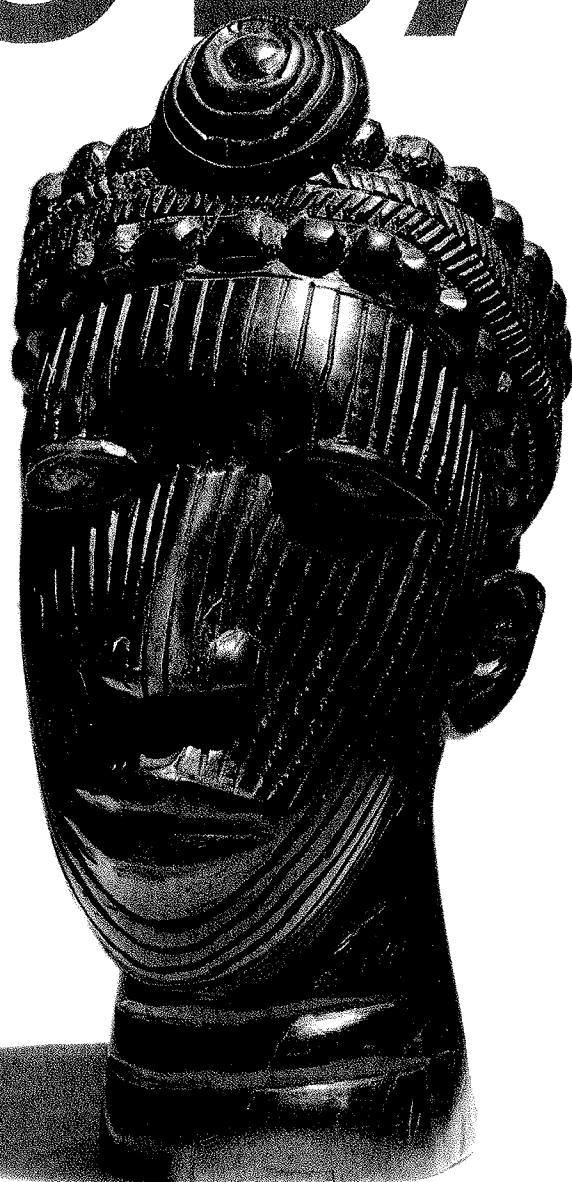
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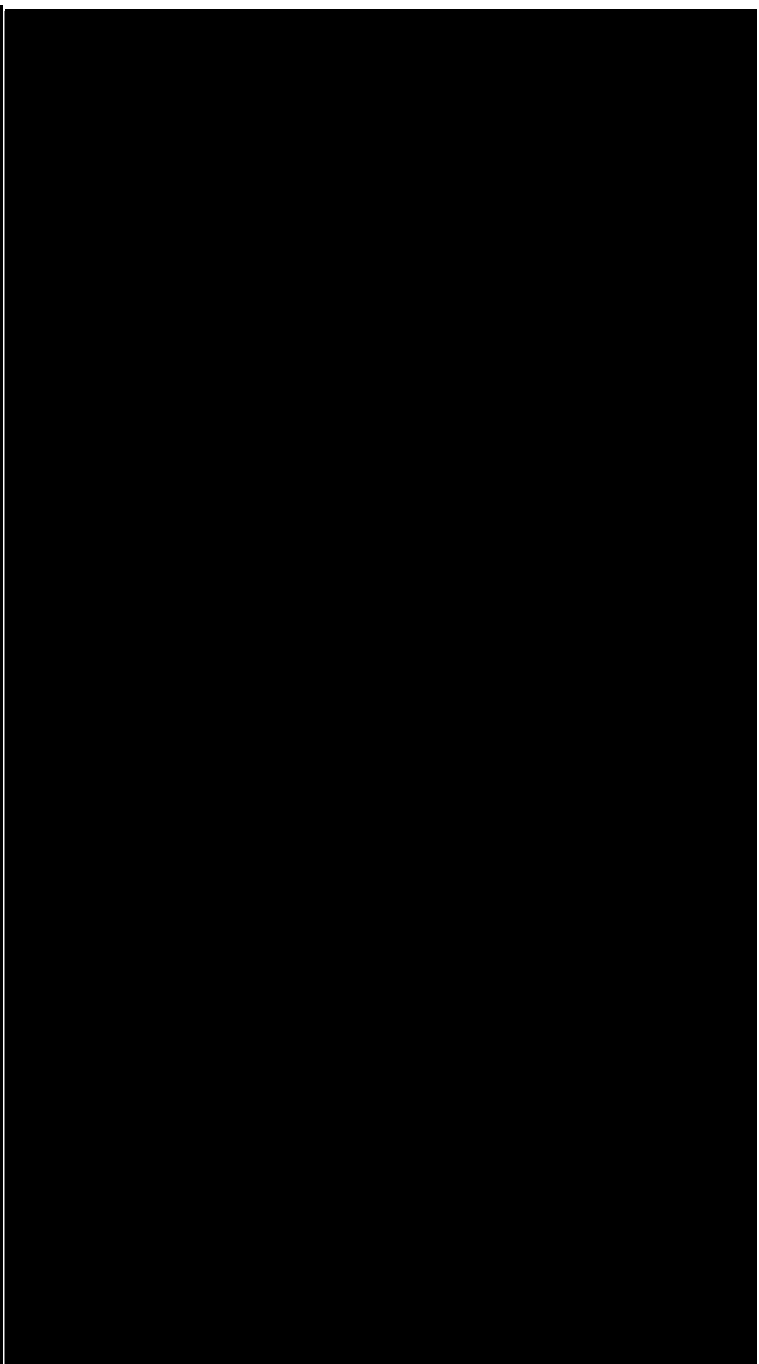




# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE YORUBA

EDITED BY  
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ỌYỌTÚNJÍ: THE YORÙBÁ COMMUNITY  
IN THE UNITED STATES

Founded in 1970 by Walter Eugene "Serge" King, Ọyọtúnjí African Village is located near Sheldon, Beaufort County, South Carolina. King was a black nationalist who found in separatist ideology the solution to his fervent search for a black cultural identity in the 1960s. While this separatist ideology was rooted in the black national identity movement of the turbulent 1950s and 1960s, its uniqueness lies in the fact

that King eschewed mere rhetoric. He planned carefully, traveling in the mid-1950s to Egypt, where he was introduced to Kemetic antiquities, and thereafter to Cuba and Haiti, where he was introduced to West African indigenous cultures and New World Vodou religion. King was steadfast in his conviction that the healing balm to assuage the battered social identity of blacks in America could be only the rejection of the enslaving cultural baggage of Western civilization and the donning on of the mantle of a reinvented West African culture. It would take him many years of travel abroad in the 1950s and 1960s to study the mores, values, and cultures of West Africa as well as to undergo a formal initiation into Yorùbá religion, endeavors he undertook in order to realize his separatist vision.

In contrast to the integrationist vision of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and what he believed was the violent, anti-American credo of the Black Panther Party, Serge King founded Òyótúnjì African Village in fall 1970. He hoped that it would become part of the resolution to the issue of black ethnic and cultural identity. King had been initiated into the cult of Ifá in Abẹ̀dókúta, Ògún State, Nigeria, and was crowned Ọba (King) Ẹ́fúntọ́lá Osejeman Adélabú Adéfúnmi I of Òyótúnjì African Village in 1972. Residents of the ten-acre, innovative community numbered between 200 and 250 practitioners of black nationalist ideology; Òyótúnjì flourished as the first authentic, independent Yorùbá village outside the African continent. However, by Adéfúnmi I's death in 2005, its population had dwindled drastically. Nonetheless, his son, Ọba Adéjuyìgbé Adéfúnmi II, has kept the village going until the present.

The name Òyótúnjì, which literally means “Òyó reawakens and rises again,” derives from the ancient and powerful Old Òyó Empire. The village is an eclectic *mélange* of northeastern and West African borrowings and influences mainly from Beninese (the former Dahomey Empire), Egyptian, Ashanti, Fon, and other African cultures. As a political outgrowth of a separatist community during the civil rights and Black Power movements, Òyótúnjì emerged as an invented alternative New World “African” culture, committed to the invocation and reclamation of West African ancestry, specifically of Yorùbá traditions and the reinvention of traditional African religion, replete with Yorùbá deities, shrines, and religious rituals and festivals.

The village's origin bears the marks of twenty- and twenty-first-century black nationalism, as King envisioned it: a place where blacks in the Diaspora could come to venerate sacred Yorùbá deities through dance, chants, ritual sacrifice, and where novices could be initiated into priesthood. Indeed, many people throughout the Diaspora have visited Òyótúnjì to venerate Yorùbá deities and their ancestors or to complete initiation rites into priesthood.

See also *Diaspora: Yorùbá in North America*; Lucumí; Nagó

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